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19 March 1963

SUBJECT: Epidemic of Gastroenteritis in Cuba

Many Cuban refugees, some of them doctors, have reported that outbreaks of gastroenteritis of epidemic proportions occurred throughout Cuba during the summer months of 1962. Most of the reports suggest that the incidence of the disease reached a peak in July or August, tapering off afterward. Children in particular were said to have been seriously hit by the disease, and many reportedly died. The Castro regime never has admitted that a gastroenteritis problem existed, and Cuban radio broadcasts last summer went to some lengths to attempt to refute rumors of an epidemic, attributing such reports to "counter-revolutionaries."

The refugee reports appear to be largely true. Although individual Cuban refugee sources are often biased, or inexpert in the subjects of their reporting, the large number of unrelated sources reporting on deteriorating public health in Cuba and the internal consistency and plausibility of their reports gives them credibility. No statistics concerning last summer's outbreak of gastroenteritis are available, but the refugee reports indicate that it was severe. A Cuban [redacted]

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reported in late July that laboratory tests had shown 7,200 persons in the town were afflicted with gastroenteritis.

There are several underlying reasons for the increase in the incidence of communicable diseases in Cuba. These include: (a) the movement of large numbers of the people from one part of the country to another with little regard for adequate housing, pure drinking water, or proper sewage and garbage disposal facilities; (b) the food shortage, which leads Cubans to eat whatever and wherever they can; and (c) the malfunction or inadequacy of the regime's medical services.

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-2-

Few reports since last September have mentioned gastroenteritis. It presumably is no longer a serious problem. The absence of reports on the subject could be related to the drastically reduced flow of Cuban refugees into this country since that time, however.